



Dr Stephen Wilson
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We are not all exactly alike as our future insists

In August 2019, an article written for the American centre-left magazine the *New Republic*, titled 'One for All: To avert global catastrophe, we urgently need to resurrect the ancient idea of solidarity', insisted that 'we must bail one another out, this time as the sea levels continue rising around us. Either solidarity forever, or our time is up.'¹

Ferocious Love 2020 by Mikhail Karikis speaks to a movement for solidarity, asking where and why we might choose to survive together and what collective perseverance may look like. People in disparate socio-political echo chambers consistently consume public media updates about the urgency of the planet's ecosphere. As the earth melts and neoliberal governments, oligarchs, and financial giants around the globe try to 'bail one another out', prophecies and mining data continue to point at human culpability, defencelessness, interdependence and ultimately the significance of global solidarity. Time is running out and as we are warned of its limits, we are confronted with the urgent question: what is 'solidarity forever' anyway?

Karikis continues to cultivate a process-based art practice that persistently adheres to social responsibility, collective action and expanded public engagement. The work provides an immersive experience that wondrously dwells in-between fictions. This is an artist who queries the potential realities and imaginary qualities of resistance and coexistence – are we, in fact, collectively closer to making differential changes? *Ferocious Love* is asking 'will environmental catastrophe bring us together or tear us apart?'² This newly commissioned audio-visual installation opens windows into the future as it draws on youth culture, conservation-focused environmental labour and social aspiration.

Exhibited in the Wolfson ground floor gallery at Tate Liverpool, the artist created a two-channel video installation and an eight-channel audio installation. The immersive qualities of sound and image that Karikis presents occupy a distinct vision, one that is co-created in collaboration with art students from Birmingham City University, alongside the production of original weather sound scores aligned with meteorological phenomena performed by the Liverpool Socialist Singers. Karikis eloquently invigorates new activist ideals – with students and a protest choir – in support of today’s urgent global campaigns, such as indigenous worldbuilding communities, the rights of nature, green energy, zero-carbon economies and the decaying biosphere. Just as the Liverpool Socialist Singers do, Karikis extends the socialist campaign of inclusivity, biodiversity and equity, towards peaceful futures that oppose fascism through singing, sampling and working together.

The installation opens with a prevailing impasse of foreboding sounds of voices suspended in quiet trepidation. Tirelessly they recede into the sounds of weatherless engines as they operate without clemency to the automated clicks of a post-industrial capitalist flow. The momentum briefly shifts and things become hurried, even giddy, as the sway of sonic estrangement surrenders to a brief moment of silence. Nevertheless, when we stop to think about the monumental power of climate change and environmental justice, *Ferocious Love* begins to take on a legitimate hold, similar to old rocks that do not die but instead go deeper underground.

What starts out as the delicate sounds of a hanging chime later develops to a quickening drip followed by a larger gulp. After a scene with young individuals, each calling out into the wet darkness of a subterranean network of tunnels, the camera gently moves to a young man on a chair holding a book in the depths of a decommissioned water well. He calmly recites an altered version of *On Fire* by Naomi Klein, which has been redacted to the past tense: ‘We were born for *that* moment. By far, our biggest obstacle *was* hopelessness.’ As the reading continues to engineer brittle terrains and exercise water flows that melody the atmosphere, others gradually descend into the tunnel from a nearby ladder, arriving in their respective avenues on the screen. They look somewhat spectral and a little weary, wearing dark overalls. We witness them assembling, mutually listening and contributing questions

on society until they freely offer sentences completing the narrative of 'we are together because' – a tender homage to Pauline Oliveros. As their thoughts pass, a hovering rain thickens, and a sense of deterioration intensifies. Karikis carefully sharpens his concerns over the agency of self-organised societies by introducing a reborn appreciation for nature and climate justice against a backdrop of abused economies and political systems. We are reminded watchfully throughout the experience of viewing *Ferocious Love* how our lives are intertwined and dependent on the climate, whilst the climate can live equally without us. The installation evokes and dispels both social co-creation and social anxieties, establishing a uniquely unseasoned climate zone. What we are unable to fully forecast in the future, replicates a new collective spirit of quiet creative anticipation.

Moving forward, the camera gently ascends towards the top of the tunnel and looks out to a circle of grey blue sky just before a prolonged period of incriminating darkness sets in and the climate anxiety begins. Klein describes this as the 'violence of othering in a warming world'³, as she continues today to focus on realising a radical social transformation. In *Notes on the Underground*, Rosalind Williams establishes that 'subterranean space is a paradoxical site of fear and hope [...] which inspires imaginations and representations of both hell and shelter.'⁴ Within both circumstances, a thud of rain finally stops in *Ferocious Love* and the experience permits new sounds of birds chirping gayly and singing in the foreground.

As we enter an era of microjustice where access to social services is being reduced, we must work with what's at hand in order to recycle and generate hopeful environmental discourses. Karikis leads us outside to woodlands, to the edge of mountainous land, where we witness trees, air, sticks and a love of branches. Filmed at the Centre of the Earth – a nature reserve and eco-therapy hub created by a community initiative on former industrially contaminated soil in Birmingham – those who were inhabiting the depravity of the underground are now surrounded by trees outside dressed in new clothes. Likewise, they now represent the appearance of protection and insulation alongside the mirrored reflections of unearthly silver umbrellas. These images are without hierarchies of power, instead suggesting self-

cleansing and repair as *Ferocious Love* recalls: 'that was the time where change could stand firmly within our grasp.'⁵

This essay was commissioned by Tate Liverpool and Birmingham City University for *Mikhail Karikis: Ferocious Love*.

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¹ Astra Taylor and Leah Hunt-Hendrix, 'One for All: To avert global catastrophe, we urgently need to resurrect the ancient idea of solidarity'– The New Republic, August 26, 2019. Accessed July 22, 2020: <https://newrepublic.com/article/154623/green-new-deal-solidarity-solution-climate-change-global-warming>

² This statement is part of the what's on at Tate Liverpool website. Accessed August 1, 2020: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/mikhail-karikis-ferocious-love>

³ In 2016 Naomi Klein delivered an honorary Edward Said lecture at the Southbank Centre which she titled, 'Let them Drown, The Violence of Othering in a Warming World'.

⁴ Rosalind Williams (2008) *Notes on the Underground: An Essay on Technology, Society, and the Imagination*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

⁵ Second last sentence in the film script for *Ferocious Love*.